



## Nonviolent Communication: Learning to Hear Yourself Again

Have you ever finished a difficult conversation and realized you knew exactly what the other person was feeling...

...but had no idea what you were feeling?

Perhaps you could explain their childhood.

Their stress.

Their trauma.

Their intentions.

Their fears.

Yet if someone asked,

*“What happened inside you?”*

You wouldn't know where to begin.

Many people recovering from emotionally unhealthy relationships describe exactly this experience.

They become experts in understanding everyone else.

And strangers to themselves.

Nonviolent Communication offers a gentle invitation back.

Not simply toward better conversations...

But toward a better relationship with ourselves.

### What Is Nonviolent Communication?

Nonviolent Communication (NVC), developed by psychologist Dr. Marshall Rosenberg, is often described as a communication model.

It helps people move away from blame, criticism, and defensiveness toward curiosity, empathy, and connection.

But before it changes the way we speak...

It changes the way we listen.

Especially to ourselves.

At its heart, NVC asks four simple questions:

**What happened?**

**What am I feeling?**

**What need is alive in me?**

**What request would support that need?**

Those questions sound simple.

Many of us discover they are anything but.

## **We Often Learn to Listen Outward Instead of Inward**

Children naturally experience feelings and needs.

But many grow up hearing messages like:

*“Don’t be so sensitive.”*

*“Stop crying.”*

*“You’re fine.”*

*“You’re overreacting.”*

*“You shouldn’t feel that way.”*

Over time we learn something important.

Not about emotions.

About survival.

We learn that paying attention to ourselves may not be safe.

So we become skilled at paying attention to everyone else instead.

## **Observation Is Different From Interpretation**

One of the first things NVC teaches is the difference between what happened...

...and the story we tell ourselves about what happened.

Imagine someone doesn't return your phone call.

Observation:

*"They haven't returned my call in two days."*

Interpretation:

*"They don't care about me."*

Observation describes what we can actually see or hear.

Interpretation adds meaning.

That distinction creates space.

Not because our interpretations are always wrong.

But because separating facts from assumptions helps us respond with greater clarity.

## **Feelings Are Not Thoughts**

Many of us think we're naming feelings when we're actually expressing judgments.

For example:

*"I feel ignored."*

*"I feel rejected."*

*"I feel manipulated."*

These experiences are real.

But they also contain interpretations.

NVC encourages us to ask:

What emotion is underneath?

Perhaps...

Sad.

Afraid.

Lonely.

Disappointed.

Confused.

Hurt.

Naming the emotion often helps us understand ourselves more deeply.

## **Every Feeling Points Toward a Need**

This is one of the ideas I appreciate most about NVC.

Feelings aren't problems.

They're information.

They often point toward something important.

Feeling lonely may point toward connection.

Feeling overwhelmed may point toward rest.

Feeling angry may point toward fairness or respect.

Feeling anxious may point toward safety or certainty.

Instead of asking,

*"How do I stop feeling this?"*

NVC asks,

*"What need might this feeling be trying to protect?"*

That question changes the relationship we have with our emotions.

## **Requests Are Different From Demands**

Once we recognize a need, we can ask:

*"What would help?"*

Sometimes the answer involves another person.

Sometimes it doesn't.

Perhaps the request is:

Take a walk.

Drink water.

Rest.

Set a boundary.

Call a friend.

Delay an important decision.

Ask for clarification.

The request isn't about controlling other people.

It's about caring for ourselves with intention.

## **What About Manipulative Relationships?**

Many people discover NVC while hoping it will help difficult relationships.

Sometimes it does.

When both people are genuinely interested in understanding one another, NVC can create remarkable conversations.

But there are relationships where mutual understanding is not the shared goal.

If someone consistently distorts reality, avoids accountability, or uses communication primarily to gain control, speaking more compassionately may not change the dynamic.

That doesn't mean NVC has failed.

It may simply mean the relationship lacks the conditions needed for genuine dialogue.

Where NVC remains profoundly valuable is here:

It helps us stay connected to ourselves.

It helps us notice what we are feeling.

What we need.

What boundaries may be asking to be set.

Sometimes the greatest gift of NVC isn't changing the conversation.

It's preventing us from disappearing inside it.

## **How This Connects to Piecing Together Peace**

Imagine someone says:

*"You're too sensitive."*

### **Manipulation Psychology**

Is this part of a larger pattern?

Is it dismissive?

Controlling?

Gaslighting?

## **Attachment Theory**

What expectations about relationships become activated?

Do I immediately fear rejection?

## **Polyvagal Theory**

What does my nervous system do?

Do I become anxious?

Do I shut down?

## **Somatic Experiencing**

What happens in my body?

Does my chest tighten?

Does my stomach drop?

## **Internal Family Systems**

Which part of me immediately believes those words?

Which part becomes protective?

## **Nonviolent Communication**

What am I feeling?

What need is asking for attention?

What would caring for that need look like?

Each perspective offers something different.

Together they help us understand ourselves more completely.

## **A Simple Practice**

The next time you find yourself replaying a conversation...

Pause.

Instead of asking:

*“Why did they say that?”*

Try asking:

**What actually happened?**

**What am I feeling?**

**What need might this feeling be pointing toward?**

**What is one small thing I can do to care for that need?**

Notice that none of those questions require the other person to change.

They invite you back into relationship with yourself.

## **Nonviolent Communication and Whole-Person Health**

Our emotional lives influence our physical lives.

When we repeatedly ignore our feelings and needs, stress can accumulate.

Over time this may influence:

- sleep
- digestion
- muscle tension
- energy
- concentration
- emotional regulation
- health behaviors

This doesn't mean every symptom comes from unmet emotional needs.

Nor does it mean listening to ourselves replaces medical care.

It means our inner experience is part of our overall health.

Just as nutrition nourishes the body...

Understanding ourselves nourishes the person living inside that body.

## **Healing Begins With Listening**

Many of us spent years becoming fluent in other people's emotions.

We learned to anticipate.

To accommodate.

To explain.

To make sense of everyone else's experience.

Somewhere along the way, we stopped asking about our own.

Perhaps healing begins there.

Not with better arguments.

Not with finding the perfect words.

But with quietly turning inward and asking,

*“What is true for me right now?”*

Because the relationship you are rebuilding is not only the one you have with other people.

It is the one you have with yourself.

And every time you listen to your own feelings with curiosity instead of judgment...

You are teaching yourself something that may have been missing for a very long time.

Your inner experience matters.

And that is where genuine communication begins.